

NEWS FROM ED MARKEY

United States Congress

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Massachusetts Seventh District

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BUSH ADMIN. CUTS DIRTY BOMB PREVENTION PROGRAM

Rep. Markey: Termination of successful DOE program is "utterly mystifying and completely unacceptable"

WASHINGTON, DC- Representative Edward Markey (D-MA), a senior Member of the Energy and Commerce Committee and the Select Committee on Homeland Security today released a letter to Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham, questioning the Department of Energy's (DOE's) decision to cancel a program to catalog and collect unwanted and unneeded radioactive sources that could be used to make a dirty bomb from national laboratories, and DOE's failure to guarantee a future for a successful program to retrieve orphaned sources from hospitals and universities.

"We know that al Qaeda has been trying to get radioactive materials for use in a dirty bomb," Rep. Markey said. "We also know that over 1700 sources have been lost—with more than half still missing—in the last five years in the United States alone. The Nuclear Materials Stewardship Program has been very effective in retrieving abandoned radioactive sources and storing them safely. The Department of Energy should not have cancelled it."

DOE established the Nuclear Materials Stewardship Program (NMSP) to assist DOE sites with the inventory and disposition of surplus nuclear materials, including surplus sealed radioactive sources. By collecting excess nuclear materials in a single location, it is easier to guarantee the security of the material. Through this program, surplus plutonium, uranium, thorium, cesium, strontium and cobalt have been safely stored in a single location, resulting in savings of \$2.6 million in Fiscal Year 2002. The program took 5 years and only \$9 million to create and is prepared to assist not only DOE sites but also other Federal Agencies, hospitals, universities and other users of radioactive sources. However, in June 2002, Assistance Secretary for Environmental Management Jessie Roberson announced that the NMSP should plan on completing and closing out in FY 2003, effectively terminating the program. Another program, the Office of Source Recovery (OSRP), has retrieved over 8000 unwanted and unneeded radioactive sources from hospitals and universities. While this program received funding in the FY 2003 Supplemental Appropriations for the Department of Homeland Security, this funding will expire in FY 2004.

Nearly a year later, at the May, 2003, Group of Eight (G-8) summit in Evian, France, President Bush announced that "the G-8 launched a major new initiative to improve the security of radioactive sources and prevent their use by terrorists." This program commits the G-8 to many of the tasks performed domestically by the NMSP and OSRP and include tracking of sources and recovery of orphaned sources, improving export controls, increasing physical protection of sources, ensuring safe disposal of unwanted sources and assisting other countries in disposing or safely storing unwanted sources. Rep. Markey's letter asks Secretary Abraham how the Administration plans to carry out this commitment if

it proceeds to cancel the NMSP program and leaves the OSRP program in funding and administrative limbo.

Rep. Markey concluded, "President Bush and the other leaders in the Group of Eight have recognized that dirty bombs are a threat to us all and issued a call to collect orphaned sources and improve export controls. Why, then, is the Department of Energy canceling and jeopardizing the future of existing, successful programs to do just that?"

A copy of the Markey letter and additional related information is available at Rep. Markey's website, <http://www.house.gov/markey>.

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